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ABSTRACT

Two concurrent studies, full and part-time students enrolled in 1968 and in 1971, were undertaken at Santa Fe Community College to investigate student attrition. The 1968 sample consisted of 43% females and 56% males, with 50% ranging in age from 17 to 20, and 34% married. The graduate group was 40% of the total, but there was no significant difference in score distribution between graduates and nongraduates on the Florida Twelfth Grade Test. The average grade point average for graduates was 3.17; for nongraduates, 2.96. 48% of the graduates were 20 or under. Some 77% of the graduates had requested transcripts to be sent to another institution, as had 35% of the nongraduates. Students who did not reenroll often stated it was for financial, personal, or employment reasons. (RS)

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TWO ATTRITION STUDIES AT SANTA FE COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Ann Bromley

It has been found by several researchers, among them: Cope, Iffert, Marsh, Panos and Astin, Summerskill, Trent and Ruyle, that an institution cannot reliably infer from other institutions reasons for student non-persistence. While many common elements are shared by institutions of higher education, each community college and university has its own environmental setting. At Santa Fe Community College, the elements of traditional commonality probably are fewer than at other institutions. The success grading system, the lack of an academic or social probation and suspension system, the emphasis on behavioral objectives, the unit structuring, the beginning required course in which the student studies himself, the multiple-role instructors and counselors, and the curricular patterns are elements which collectively make Santa Fe unique.

Early in September, 1971 the Research Advisory Committee of the College listed several research problems which it considered worthy of investigation. They ranked an attrition study at the top. They wanted answers or data to help answer four basic questions:

1. What is the attrition rate at the College?
2. How long does a student remain at the College in order to secure a degree?

This paper was presented at the American Educational Research Association meeting in New Orleans, February 26, 1973. Dr. Bromley is Dean for Records and Admissions at Santa Fe Community College, Gainesville, Florida.

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3. What are the reasons a student leaves the College?

4. What steps might the College have taken to help the student continue his education?

The Advisory Committee recommended that two concurrent studies be undertaken -- a study of full- and part-time credit students who were enrolled in September, 1968 and a study of full- and part-time first time at Santa Fe credit students enrolled in September, 1971. It was recognized that if we used only the 1968 sample our data would be based on record information; if we used only the 1971 sample, several years would pass before our data were sufficiently large to respond to our research questions. Therefore, we undertook to study both populations at the same time.

In September, 1968 there were 2,054 full- and part-time credit students enrolled at Santa Fe Community College. Since student record information is not a part of the College computer data bank, a ten per cent random sample of the 1968 credit enrollment was selected for study. The sample had a final N of 210. You may be interested to know that the random sample was chosen over the selective only after careful consideration. Two possible samples were identified -- one by each method -- and the random sample were nearly correlated with the sex breakdown of the college than did the selective sampling procedure. The records of this group of students were studied for the three year period from September 1968 to September 1971.

Similarly, a random sample was chosen of the full- and part-time first time credit students (N=1689) enrolled in September, 1971. Since the first time enrollment consisted of two identifiable strata, it was decided to bring greater precision to our 1971 sample through the use of representatively proportional stratified techniques. The two strata considered were first-time Santa Fe students who had not previously attended college (N=1231) and those who transferred college credit to Santa Fe (N=458). Our stratum of students who did not transfer college credit had an N of 472 and for the stratum with credits the N was 176. This sample and these strata gave us a N error of less than three per cent, 95 per cent of the time.

The record data were identified for the 1968 and 1971 sample. The records in the Office of Financial Aid, Records and Admissions and the annual reports of the Florida Twelfth Grade Test Results were the sources of information for the twenty-four items collected on the 210 students in the 1968 sample.

1968 STUDY

Among the topics for which information about the sample was gathered for the 1968 study were: Florida Twelfth Grade Scores, number of terms enrolled, native or transfer students, grade point average, sex, marital status, race, and completion of general education requirement. The data were analyzed for the total sample and for two sub-samples, the graduates and non-graduates as of September, 1971.

An examination of the total 1968 sample of 210 students showed:

1. The sample consisted of 43% females and 56% males.

2. The majority were single, but 34% indicated married status.

3. Their ages ranged from 17 to 62, with slightly more than 50% between 17 and 20.

4. 57% started their college work at Santa Fe.

5. For the 43% who transferred college credit, the breakdown was: 20% from other Florida Junior Colleges, 13% from Florida four year colleges and universities and 10% from out-of-state colleges.

6. The number of terms enrolled ranged from one to sixteen with the arithmetic mean being 5.83.

7. 43% did not attend during summer terms and the number of terms skipped between one enrollment and the next varied from one to ten or more, with the average being .88 terms, excluding summers.

8. Our graduate group was 40% of the total sample, but it should be pointed out that of the 124 remaining in the non-graduate group 10, or 8%, were enrolled for the summer term 1971 which was the cut-off date for the study. Since that time 2 more students have graduated.

As I indicated earlier, we divided the total 1968 sample into a graduate (N=86) subgroup and non-graduate (N-124) subgroup as of September, 1971 and analyzed the sub-samples in a manner similar to that used for the total sample. A few of the findings from the comparative analysis are:

1. There was no significant difference between the distribution of scores of the graduates and the scores of the non-graduates on the Florida Twelfth Grade Test.

2. For the graduates, 47% were females; 53% males. For the non-graduates, females were 42% and the males 58%.

3. The average GPA for the graduates was 3.17; for the non-graduates, 2.96.

4. With respect to age at time of admission, 48% of our graduates were 20 or younger.

5. 77% of our graduates requested transcripts be sent to another institution. Of those making such a request, 51 or slightly more than three-fourths, requested a copy go to the University of Florida.

6. In our non-graduate group, 35 or 28% had requested transcripts be mailed, and of those 35 there were 11 or 31% sent to the University of Florida and 42% to other community junior colleges.

The Office of Research conducted an investigation of the post-Santa Fe status of the graduates in the sample as a further refinement of the study of attrition among students enrolled at SFJC during the Fall Term, 1968. More explicitly, those graduates who were included in both the study of attrition and in the Follow-Up Study of Santa Fe Junior College Graduates 1968-70 (completed by the Office of Research in August, 1971) were examined. This refinement was undertaken to increase the descriptiveness of the study, and to measure the representativeness of the sample in the study.

Of the total number of students (210) included in the 1968 sample, 86 (40%) were graduates of the College. Exactly half (43) of these had responded to the questionnaire utilized in the Follow-Up Study of Santa Fe Junior College Graduates 1968-1970. Statistical comparisons between this subsample of the attrition study and the data of the follow-up study

revealed no differences. This gave added implication of validity for the study.

1971 STUDY

Earlier it was mentioned that for the 1971 phase of the attrition project, the sample of 648 first-time, full- or part-time credit students would be examined in two strata: (1) Those 472 students who presented no evidence of previous college credit; and (2) Those 176 students who transferred college credit to Santa Fe.

A comparison of the names on student rosters for the Fall and Winter Terms showed that 167 (twenty-six percent) students out of the sample 648 had not re-enrolled. An additional seventy students did not re-enroll between the Winter and the Spring Term, making the gross total 237 or thirty-seven percent of our total sample. However, thirteen students who had not enrolled the Winter Term returned in the Spring. The net total, therefore, is 224 students, representing thirty-five percent of the sample.

Three techniques were utilized in securing responses to our questions as to why they had not re-enrolled. First we used a semi-structured telephone interview, then a mail survey, and finally, personal interviews with the students who had not responded previously but who had re-enrolled in the Spring Term.

Originally, there were nearly forty questions suggested. Priorities were established and the final list was reduced to 10 - some with one or two sections. Among the questions were:

1. What was your main reason for not re-enrolling at SFCC the Winter Term? Were there any other reasons?

2. When did you leave during the Fall Term?

3. Before you left, did you talk with a Counselor or anyone?

4. Is there anything the College could have done to have helped you?

5. What are you doing now?

They had an opportunity to make additional comments.

Analysis of 129 responses out of the 224 showed:

1. Most students expressed only one reason for not re-enrolling and the top four in rank order were financial (twenty-five per cent), employment (sixteen per cent), other (fifteen per cent) or personal (fourteen per cent). If we combine financial and employment, it would represent the major reasons for forty-one per cent of the sample.

2. Over sixty per cent of the respondents indicated they completed their terms work with approximately one-fourth leaving college by the middle of the term or before.

3. The majority of students did not talk to anyone about their leaving, indicated they had a planned major, did not change their major, and had parents who did not attend college.

4. In response to the question as to how the college might have helped, thirty-five per cent indicated better counseling, and twenty per cent felt there was nothing the college could have done to have helped them remain in school.

5. At the time of the survey, approximately sixty per cent were working full-time, nine per cent were attending another college, and three per cent had entered the military service.

6. Seventy-nine per cent planned to continue their education at a future date. Only eleven students did not intend to return to college.

SUMMARY

Two attrition studies of students of Santa Fe have been reported. Based on precisely defined samples of full- and part-time credit students, a study of twenty-four items on each student record for September, 1968 was undertaken primarily to give answers to the questions: (1) What is the attrition rate at the College; and (2) How long does a student remain to secure a degree?

To secure data related to the reasons a student leaves the College and what the College could have done to be helpful, a study was undertaken utilizing a random sample of full- and part-time first-time-at Santa Fe credit students in September, 1971. This phase of the study is longitudinal, and based on the findings of the 1968 sample, it would seem appropriate that it run from a minimum of three to possibly five years. Preliminary data has been gathered on why they leave and what they are doing.

Some findings were:

1. Forty per cent of the 1968 sample had graduated.
2. Of the non-graduates, 35 or twenty-eight per cent had transcripts sent to other institutions.
3. Many of the non-graduates are still enrolled at the College.
4. The distribution of scores on the Florida Twelfth Grade tests were not significant between the graduates and non-graduates.
5. Generally, students who did not re-enroll from one term to the next stated it was for a financial, personal or employment reason.

6. Fourteen per cent said they would have remained in school if they had received enough financial aid.

The non-graduate students in the 1968 sample will continue to be followed. Each additional term more students in the sample graduate. The 1971 study will take from three to five years to complete, and the data from the 1968 sample will serve to validate the 1971 findings. No where in either study was the term "drop-out" used; its connotations are negative, misleading and non-standardized. Hopefully, it is a term that will fall into disuse.

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